

Heroes O' the Multiverse

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Summary: The death of a minor demon tears a hole in warp space, sending the Master Chief, a Dominion Ghost, an Inquisitor of the Imperium of man and their companions into the Reaper-verse. On the bright side, Shepard gains some powerful allies. Contains some language, decent amounts of violence, and several OCs.

1. Warp Interference

****2555AD-0130ET-**_**FOREWARD UNTO DAWN**_**-UNKOWN
SPACE-FORUNNERVERSE****

Cortana was getting nervous. She had been observing a strange anomaly that had been approaching the ship for a week now, and was not sure if or when she should awaken the chief. It would reach them soon, and she still had no idea what it was.

When it was only an hour away, she decided to pop the cryo chamber.

The Chief awoke dazedly, but as he remembered where he was his senses brought him swiftly back to reality.

"Cortana?" He called.

Cortana would have sighed contentedly if she had had lungs, or even a mouth for that matter. It was good to hear that gravelly voice again. "Good to see you up again, Chief. How was your nap?"

The Chief smiled, Cortana's tone reassuring him that there was no imminent danger. "As good as cryo-sleep gets. How long?"

"Three years, Chief." Cortana paused for a moment, letting the Chief adjust. "Anyways, ready to pop the hatch?"

"Go." The cryo chamber unsealed and Spartan John-117, Master

Chief-Petty officer of the UNSC, slid out of the tomb he had slumbered in for years, ready to fight once more.

"Fill me in, Cortana." The Chief said.

Her holographic projection smiled. "Basically, we are rapidly approaching some strange anomaly in space. We're probably going to pass through it, so I wanted you to have time to prepare in case we need to blast our way out of here."

The Chief nodded. "I'm going to stock up, then." He walked down the breadth of the ship to the armory and quickly gathered up a battle rifle, an assault rifle, a magnum, several grenades, a shotgun, and a large amount of ammo. With this significant load he returned to the room where he had left Cortana, who was impatiently tapping her holographic foot against the podium.

"How long until we hit the anomaly?" The chief asked.

"Minutes. Maybe you should take cover in the pod."

The Chief nodded. "Maybe you should, too. Ready to eject?"

Cortana grinned. "I guess if I absolutely have to get back into that cramped suit of yours, better now than never." The hologram disappeared, and the card ejected into the Chief's waiting hands. He gently raised it up to the back of his head, and inserted her again into his skull.

"Back again." Cortana said cheerfully. "Better hop to it, Chief." The Chief complied, and quickly shifted back into the cryo pod, and brought down the lid just as he felt the strange pull of the anomaly that was drawing them in.

****The 41****st**** Millenium-1320TT-CADIA-Eye of
Terror-IMPERIUMVERSE****

Inquisitor Maresia had never fought a demon she could not defeat, but this particular encounter was at least becoming very tiring.

"BLOOD FOR THE BLOOD GOD!" The oversized bloodletter howled, unleashing another horde of corrupted heretical followers. "SKULLS FOR HIS SKULL THRONE!"

"Feel the wrath of the emperor, DEMON!" Shouted Arcturus Typhan, an Astartes Terminator of the Blood Ravens. He was the only member of his chapter that had answered the call of the Inquisitor; the rest were preoccupied with the legion of Chaos Space Marines besieging the building.

Still, he did have a rather large hammer.

The thunderous strikes of that mighty weapon annihilated the vanguard of the heretical horde, while the Inquisitor's sword quickly eviscerated any stragglers. Maresia was grateful for the presence of a space marine, as it required all of her considerable psychic might just to hold back the demon and she would not have been able to deal with the hordes of heretics at the same time. Even that might not have been enough, but they were fortunately blessed with another ally, who made his presence known with a plasma blast directly to the

demon's face, liquefying one of its eyes. The bloodletter screamed horrendously and unleashed a wave of hellfire, which Arcturus narrowly ducked underneath. The demon threw a ball of force in the general direction of the foe who had taken out its eye, but Artisan Narkos Mossk dodged nimbly out of the way, a surprising feat considering the two large mechanical arms attached to his back. The priest frowned under his hood, making some slight adjustments on the plasma cannon he was holding.

Seeing his foes still unharmed, the demon leaped at the space marine, swinging down its gigantic demonic blade. The experienced marine stepped into the demon's wild swing and slammed his thunder hammer up into its chest, sending it flying back. It landed on its feet and found itself surrounded on three sides by the tiring but exceedingly dangerous assailants.

"You... you pitiful slime, you false angel and foolish human and putrid cyborg think to defeat me, Akjonoklosolakar, demon lord of Khorne? You will BURN!"

"Nay, foul incarnation," Maresia said as she advanced on the demon, "YOU will!" She stabbed her ancient power blade through its throat, funneling all of her psychic might into one furious blast of fire from her blade, incinerating the demon's head and neck. The head went one way, the body another, as both fell clumsily to the ground.

"Emperor be praised." The Inquisitor said, pulling out her blade and sending a solemn prayer to the emperor for his guidance.

"That was surprisingly easy." The Astartes commented.

"Still not quite right... at least the accuracy is good. Needs better coolant..." The Tech Priest muttered.

Suddenly, the demon's body began to glow. The inquisitor had enough time to think _Oh sweet emperor!- _before it turned into a wormhole of warp energy, instantly dragging them all inside.

**2504AD-0745KT-Unnamed Shuttle-Dominion
Backwater-XEL'NAGERVERSE**

"Can't this thing go any faster?" the girl yelled into his ear as he swerved to avoid an enraged mutalisk.

"It might if you would stop distracting me!" He said through gritted teeth. Roy Jorhann was an experienced Dominion Ghost(though this was certainly testing his loyalty), but he had never cut it this closely before. He had been sent to test out some new combat tech on the front lines, but he'd been saddled with an idiotic general. Roy had done his best to organize the ground forces against the rebels they were supposed to be fighting, but the zerg had shown up and shot everything to hell. Jim Raynor and his Raiders had been trapped, but now He had already been planning on reporting the general in charge of this mission for incompetence when he returned for debriefing, but apparently the dislike was mutual and the general had decided to leave him first. In a war-zone. A Zerg-infested warzone. On an entire planet of Zerg infested war-zones. All alone. Well... almost all alone.

"Happy place happy place happy place..." The girl muttered, rocking back and forth in her chair. In Max's professional opinion, SCV's should really be recruited from veteran combatants, not an engineering academy. He tried to tune out the girl's frightened mantra as he remembered when he had first seen the panicked SCV careen across his path, being chased by several zerglings. The situation had been getting very much out of hand, and a cloaked Roy had almost made it to a conveniently intact shuttle when he heard the SCV's panicked cries for help. He made a split second decision and turned around, rapidly took aim and expertly gunned down the zerglings.

"Hey, you!" He had called out. "Get over here if you want to live!" He hesitated for a moment, but then de-cloaked.

The vehicle had rushed over at maniacal speed, but Roy was pleasantly surprised when it pulled up to an expert stop two feet away from the Ghost instead of crashing into him. It had happened to him before, and he really preferred his ribs intact.

"Load your SCV into this shuttle and lets get the hell out of here!" He shouted. The vehicle had pulled up flawlessly into the loading dock of the small shuttle, which happened to be designed to hold exactly one SCV. Roy had come up the entrance ramp and had quickly closed the door. He began to walk toward the pilots seat but was suddenly interrupted by a flying tackle-hug.

"W-wha...?"

"ThankyouthankyouthankyousomuchyousavedmeIcan'ttellyouhowhappyIam-!"

"Okay, okay, just get off of me!" The tall Ghost had said, pushing the small brown-haired hurricane of thanks off of his chest. He hid his surprise at the fact that the SCV pilot looked to be only about sixteen, and a short girl at that. "We need to go before some ultralisk smashes this thing!"

The girl nodded, her eyes going wide. "Oh, right, yeah..."

Roy almost rolled his eyes. How someone could temporarily forget about a Zerg invasion of the planet they were on was beyond him.

"Just buckle up or something."

When Roy sat down in the pilot's chair and began the activation sequence, however, he found that they weren't going anywhere. "Damn, it won't start!" It made sense, Roy realized with growing dread. No well-repaired ship would still be sitting on a planet in the process of being overrun by Zerg.

Suddenly, the hurricane had returned. "Don't worry, I've got it!" The girl said with a grin. In an instant, the girl had opened up the maintenance hatch and was rapidly disconnecting and reconnecting wiring.

"What do you think you're-"

"Got it!" The girl proclaimed proudly, and the ship hummed to life.

Roy grabbed the controls and launched the craft into the sky, which

was fortunate as that entire position was overrun with zerglings only seconds later. Several hydralisks attempted to shoot them down from below, but fortunately that particular shuttle model was designed to be fast and quickly outranged them.

This was where their luck ended, for they had quickly picked up the attention of all the zerg organisms on and above the planet (as they now had the glorious designation of 'last terrans left alive') and were receiving the swarm's full attention. This meant that now had a huge mass of death on their trail, and it was gaining on them.

Roy again cursed the cowardly general who had abandoned the ground forces, remembering what the zerg had done to Kerrigan. He definitely did not want to be remembered as the 'King of Blades' and he was going to find a way to make the man pay for this.

He took a brief glimpse of the motion tracker and was almost blinded by the intensity of the red dots crowding behind the lonely blue dot of their transport.

Looking back through the viewport, he noticed something out of the corner of his eye...

Sparing a glance at it, he realized that it was a warp anomaly. They were rare, but he had heard stories about people who had passed through them and ended up in another part of space. It wasn't much, but it was a chance.

When the alternative is certain devouring by Zerg, a slim chance was definitely worth the risk.

"Hold on to something," He warned his passenger, "We're going in!"

"In?" The voice from the back shouted incredulously. "In what?!"

"Just hold tight, all right? Unless, of course, you want to leave this shuttle through the viewport." Max pushed even harder at the accelerator, and felt the force increase slightly. With luck they would make it, but it was going to be close, mutalisks were already closing around the warp anomaly.

Max flinched as he felt a strange pull on his mind from the warp rift. He had been ranked as one of the most psychically powerful ghosts to come out of the academy, equal to the great Nova Terra herself, so he knew what 'overpowered psychic crap' felt like, and this was definitely giving that impression. This rift felt a lot more sinister than it had before. Still, Max would take 'mysterious' and 'dangerous' over 'zerg' any day.

He counted down the seconds, feeling every vibration that signaled a zerg spine clipping the shuttle.

"Five..." The massive hive mind pressed against his thoughts.

"Four..." It was all around him.

"Three..." Hunt. Fight. Swarm.

"Two..." _**Kill. Die. Kill.**_

"One..." _**BLOOD. FEAST. BLOOD.**_

The two terrans felt a strange energy in the air around them as their ship tore into a dimension neither of them could comprehend, and both drifted slowly into unconsciousness.

2185CE-2156ET-_**NORMANDY SR2**_**-TERMINUS
SYSTEMS-REAPERVERSE**

Shepard sighed. She had been working for two straight weeks now after she had been brought back to life, and the universe would just not give her any time to rest. It was probably due to her being the savior of the Citadel. It wasn't like Shepard had saved the government of civilized space because she _liked_ them or, god forbid, even wanted the glory. She was just doing the right thing, and she would have appreciated being allowed to do the right thing _and_ get some sleep. Unfortunately, that was looking like it wasn't going to happen any time soon. Every single time she would set her head down there was some dangerous criminal that needed catching or some new Reaper information or a Geth attack. Now she was trying again.

Ooooookay, sitting down on the bed...

Laying down on the bed...

Putting head on pillow...

Closing eyes... "Shepard, there is an incoming call from the Illusive Man."

"Aww come on!" Shepard shouted. She knew it wasn't the AI's fault that she could not get any rest, but that didn't mean she couldn't be frustrated.

"This had better be damn important." Shepard muttered as she stormed down to the communications room.

Shepard entered the hologram and saw the familiar face of the Illusive Man, or as Shepard had started to think of him, the Illusive prick. "What is it this time?"

The Illusive man raised an eyebrow. "Tired are we, Allison?"

"It's Shepard." The sleep deprived woman replied annoyedly. "Can you please just get to the point?"

"Indeed. Shepard, are you familiar with the 'warp dimension' theory?" The Illusive Man asked.

"No. Should I be?" Shepard asked.

"Probably not. Warp dimension theory was an idea tossed around back when humanity was originally trying to find a system of faster than light travel, inspired by the works of some renowned science fiction writers. It was deemed theoretically possible, but was mostly discarded after the Prothean information packet was discovered and

died out completely when contact with the Citadel was made. At least, that's what was thought." The Illusive Man pressed a button on the armrest of his chair, causing a large hologram of a planet to pop up.

"This is a planet called Horizon, in the Terminus systems. It holds a small colony of no true galactic consequence. However, it would appear that someone on that colony has been doing some research into the warp theory. Our spies in the colony intercepted a report only two hours ago that there was a massive spike in warp energy, something that has never been reported before. Shortly afterward, a strange space hulk simply appeared in orbit. There were also two other smaller disturbances, one on the surface of the planet. Luckily these events caused their communications units to break down, and our agents were able to alert us before anyone else. You happen to be the closest ship and we need you to go to Horizon to find out just what's going on."

"I don't suppose I have a choice?"

"No, not if you want to potentially save the colony from any possible ramifications this might have."

Shepard sighed. "All right. You'd better give me some time off after this, or I might go insane from sleep deprivation. Shepard out."

Shepard looked up at the ceiling. "Joker, set a course to the colony Horizon."

"Aye aye, captain." Joker replied, banking the sleek frigate towards the closest mass relay.

2. Landfall

****2185CE-1204TT-HORIZON SURFACE-TERMINUS SYSTEMS-REAPERVERSE****

It was quiet. Far too quiet.

There is something missing.

Maresia groaned and opened her eyes, finding herself staring into the brown cloth of her hat. She reached up carefully, though still managing to cause a twinge of dull pain, and lifted it.

A bright and alien sun blazed in the sky, momentarily blinding and disorienting her.

Too quiet.

Birds chirped, a nearby creek gurgled, wind shifted in the trees...

And suddenly she felt it, a hole where there had never been a hole before, a gaping chasm in her mind.

She could not feel the emperor.

She could not feel the emperor!

And then, as she was about to scream out in utter rage and despair, she reached out even further.

She could feel his presence, she realized with relief. It was distant, impossibly distant, but the warp between them was like a calm, flat ocean, and the normally overwhelming light of his presence was now only a haze on the horizon.

To be thrown so far by the death of a mere, pitiful demon...

Maresia heard another groan, and looked over to see the vast Space Marine she had fought alongside previously, hammer still in hand. He seemed to be in a similar state of discomfort.

"Gah..." He groaned again, brining a hand to his forehead. "Where in the Emperor's name did that accursed demon send us?" He began to carefully prop himself up, working his way to a sitting position. "This cannot be Cadia."

A buzz and a whirr confirmed that the tech priest was also still present. "Prototype relatively undamaged... systems operating at 87% capacity... planet appears to be unkown. No previous records, stars unfamiliar."

Maresia used a fraction of her remaining energy to raise an eyebrow. "You can see the stars through daylight?"

She heard the Tech Priest chuckle. It was the most human thing she'd ever seen a tech priest do. "Indeed. Modification of retina and general ocular facilities has provided vision with various filters... anti-sunlight filter allows for regarding stellar formations."

"Interesting." Maresia gathered her strength and levered herself up to a sitting position, joining Typhan. The tech priest remained prone, however, as his repair arm went through thorough repair of the minor damage passing through the warp had caused.

Maresia felt her energy begin to return to her as she began to scan their surroundings. They sat on a hilltop covered in long green grass. A tree behind them provided shade from the fierce orange sun in the sky. A small stream ran around the base of the hill, the source of the gurgling noise. The hill seemed to be part of a plain of hills stretching on into the distance, the long grass in the light wind and the rolling of the hills making it appear to be a great green sea. In the distance, Far across the plain, she could see some sort of settlement.

"Typhan. Mossk. Until we learn where we are I suggest you remain under my command. For the time being, consider yourselves part of my personal retinue. Emperor knows you've earned it." The Astartes nodded in assent, while the techpriest whirred in apparent confirmation. "Very well. When we've regained our strength," she continued, "we journey to that settlement on the far side of these hills."

She could sense many souls there, but they were very strange. Most seemed human, but where the dull tone of those untouched by the emperor. Others seemed almost alien, though she could hardly fathom

humans abiding xenos. Perhaps they had been enslaved.

Out of the corner of her eye, she noticed what appeared to be an object violently re-entering the atmosphere. She could detect two souls there as well... one of whom appeared to be a psycher.

Reaching further out, she sensed a soul beyond the atmosphere. Beyond that, however...

Something was coming.

****2185CE-1205KT-HORIZON UPPER ATMOSPHERE-TERMINUS
SYSTEMS-REAPERVERSE****

Teresa Swann had had her share of sticky situations before. From dodging Dominion pickets to outracing pirate goons, she'd always been just on the edge of disaster. Yesterday, however, had taken the figurative cake. Heck, the literal cake too. ALL the cake. Well, she thought it was yesterday. Technically speaking, it was still happening. She'd cut it too close trying to save trapped civilians and had missed her evac shuttle. 'No problem!' She thought. 'I'll just find my own ship.' Which would've been easy enough if she hadn't fallen out of the Dominion frying pan and into the inferno that was the Zerg. Honestly, she'd been almost out of fuel and hope when the ghost had popped up from out of nowhere and pulled her out of the fire, so to speak.

Not that it wasn't possible he had just pulled her into an even hotter fire. She was fairly certain he'd worn Dominion colors, meaning of course there was a big chance he was a crazy raving murderous psychopath, or at least an unhinged sociopath(not that she was jumping to conclusions-she knew there could be nice people who happened to be Ghosts too... she'd just never met any... and all the ones she'd met were at least a little crazy...oh god oh god I'm suck on a shuttle alone with a Dominion Ghost!) One wrong move could mean her death. Also, as he was probably a psychic, one wrong thought could mean her death. She decided to camouflage her thoughts by using her classic technique... of concentrating on cat pictures. Adorable cat pictures. Cat pictures so distractingly cute... that she lost her train of thought.

While thinking fiercely about an adorable ginger-furred kitten, she forced open her eyelids to check on the other occupant of the shuttle. For some reason she felt really tired... possibly related to the strange portal thingy the Ghost had flown them through. It looked like he was tired too, as his head was laying flat on the control stick. Maybe that was why the shuttle was now diving really fast into a strange atmosphere.

Wait.

Ship was diving... really fast... at a gigantic piece of rock...

"Ghost!" She shouted at the pilot. "Oy! Ghost dude! Guy! Person! Whatever your name is! Wake up!"

The Ghost dude continued to sleep.

Teresa quickly glanced around for a throwable object, finding a convenient plush zergling at the base of her seat. After a minute of straining and straining to reach it(no way in Char was she going to unbuckle her seatbelt) she finally grasped hold. Pulling back her hand, she took expert aim and chucked it at the sleeping figure.

It missed, instead hitting the radio half a foot to Ghost dude's right. The radio came on, blasting "_Heeeeeeyaaaaayaaaaayayay! Heeeeeeyaaaaayay! I said hey! What's go-in on?_" To which Teresa covered her ears and asked the universe why someone would have such an annoying thing on loop in their starship. _At least_, she thought, _That's gotta wake up Ghost dude, right?_ To which the universe, and Ghost dude's mask's audio filters, answered with a no.

Craaaaaaaaap! Teresa tried kicking his chair, but found that her legs were just slightly too short.

Come on dude! Wake up! Please? Pretty please? Gorgeous please? With a cherry on top?

Alas, the universe cared not for cherries.

****2185CE-1205ET-HORIZON ORBIT-TERMINUS
SYSTEMS-REAPERVERSE****

Cortana's systems came quickly back online, finding no damage from the strange anomaly they'd passed through. Master Chief was fast asleep, although she could see no particular reason why and assumed it involved the effects of the anomaly. As his systems were stable, Cortana decided to check on the ship.

Slipping through the cyberverses to where she'd left a clone of herself in the ship's systems, she found that they'd been sent... well, she had no idea where, but they were in stable planetary orbit. For a brief moment she considered waking the chief, but decided to wait and monitor the situation for a time first.

Cortana settled back on the sensors, happening to notice a strange blip on the radar behind the planet's moon.

****2185CE-1215TT-HORIZON SURFACE-TERMINUS SYSTEMS-REAPERVERSE****

The trio of Imperials had been walking along for some time now. Conversation was not something that was generally practiced by Inquisitors, Astartes, or Tech Priests, but the walk was certainly beginning to grow boring and they had nothing in particular. Additionally, Maresia was beginning to feel curious about the Astartes. She had had no time to truly observe the man before, preoccupied as she was with the forces of chaos, and she had thought him to be a regular space marine. A veteran, a Terminator no less, but they were not entirely uncommon. Yet his armor was clearly different, seeming to have far more speed and agility than a normal carapace yet maintaining the indomitable defence of a Terminator suit. It appeared to be custom made, and recently too, something completely unheard of in the imperial forces. His helm appeared to be that of a Grey Knight, and his hammer...

"Typhan..." Maresia said, "Your hammer."

"Hmm?" The space marine responded.

"That is no normal force hammer. That is a... dare I say that is a Nemisis Daemonhammer?"

"Indeed." He responded.

"B-but they are legendary weapons, crafted only by the Inquisition as a perfect combination of Thunder hammer force and Daemonhammer psycher energy and given only to high level inquisitors or members of the Grey Knights! And you would have to be a psycher to wield one-"

"I am."

"...how is it that you have won the right to wield a Nemisis Daemonhammer?"

"It is called _Emperor's Fist_. As to how I received it..."

The Astartes stopped. "We have other things to worry about at the moment. Namely, that." He pointed a giant gloved hand into the sky, directing their attention to what appeared to be a small spacecraft diving at breakneck speeds towards their general position.

"It may be a good idea," Maresia murmured, "to get out of the way."

****2185CE-1216KT-HORIZON LOWER ATMOSPHERE-TERMINUS
SYSTEMS-REAPERVERSE****

Teresa had finally had enough. She had yelled until her throat hurt trying to wake the lazy Dominion lackey up from his catnap, and the gorram radio had officially driven her halfway to insanity. It was time.

IT. WAS. TIME.

She reached for the seatbelt, but paused. _Choice between possible maiming/death and certain death..._

She unplugged the seatbelt and crawled to the controls, careful not to lose her grip. She really didn't want to end up a Terran pancake on the back wall.

She finally reached the control panel, only to find mister lazyghosts fists gripping the controls and really not letting go.

Aww come on! She tried to pry him off, but multitasking holding herself down and getting his hands off was impossible.

Then she had another idea. It was kind of awkward, but it would do. She took a quick look out the viewport and really wished she hadn't.

She took a leap and latched onto the Ghost's arm, frantically swinging under and between his arms. They seemed almost rock solid, which she guessed was probably some sort of defense mechanism in the suit, as the whole thing was like a Ghost statue. Sitting on his legs and doing her best to not feel awkward, Teresa grabbed the throttle

and pulled upwards, managing to shift it a little out of the unconscious Ghost's hands.

The ground was scarily close now, to the point where she could make out individual trees. _COME ON! _She shouted in her mind.

They were pulling up, but way too slowly, and there was no way to get the stupid Ghost's hands to move any further.

"Wha... where am I?" A voice said drowsily from behind her.

"DUDE! PulluppulluppulluppullupPUUUUUULLLLLUUUUP!"

"What the f-OH GOD!" Roy woke from unconsciousness to find a crazy girl on his lap, holding the throttle to a ship that was about to crash into a very green planet.

He immediately hauled back on the throttle, turning the ship 180 degrees and breaking large amounts of fairly important equipment with the G-force. He gunned the engine, pushing against their descent, but it still wasn't strong enough. The girl sitting in his lap was not being particularly helpful either.

"OH GOD YOU IDIOT WHAT ARE YOU DOING WE COULD"VE RIDDEN OFF THE ENERGY BY PULLING UP AT AN ANGLE OH GOD WE ARE SO SCREWED WHYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYY?"

"Could you please stop shouting for half a second! I can't even see the viewport, move your head! Just get off the chair!"

In response she turned around and locked her arms around his waist and locked on tight. "Happy place happy place happy place-"

"Oh for the love of-BRACE FOR IMPACT!"

****2185CE-1221TT-HORIZON SURFACE-TERMINUS SYSTEMS-REAPERVERSE****

The three Imperials watched, somewhat bemusedly, as the ship attempted to right itself far too late, managing to hit the ground with enough force to plow a reasonably sized trench but not explode or shatter into rubble. It was, however, on fire.

"Should we... help?" Typhan asked.

The inquisitor shrugged. "I see no particular reason to. It looks as if they should be able to exit the ship without assistance."

They did not need to wait long before the occupants of the shuttle made themselves known.

****2185CE-1221KT-HORIZON SURFACE-TERMINUS SYSTEMS-REAPERVERSE****

"Whoa!" Roy sat back up. The chair had actually broken loose from its fittings in the crash and was now leaning on the far end of the ship. Luckily, the former owner had seen fit to pad the seats significantly, and combined with his combat suit's protection he was fairly undamaged.

It took him a moment to remember and check for the girl. Her grip had

slipped, and she now lay unmoving on the deck a ways behind him.

He carefully stood, adjusting to the strange angle of the floor, and made his way to her side.

For half a moment he considered leaving her there. She would be extra baggage, a distraction. He'd need to find his way to the nearest Dominion outpost, and there was no particular use to having her with him.

I can't just leave her here, though, He thought as the smell of smoke wafted in through the engine room.

He knelt down, preparing to lift her up, when she stirred.
"Ughn..."

"Hey. Girl. Can you hear me?"

"That's a little rude. You could just ask me my name. It's Teresa, by the way."

"Get up." He grabbed onto her arm. "There's a fire in the engine room, or there will be soon, so we only have minutes to find a way out of here."

With a sigh, she levered herself to a sitting position. "We could always just use Kate."

"Kate?" Roy was fairly certain that there were no other people on the shuttle. He really hoped there were no other people on the shuttle. If there had been... there probably weren't anymore.

"Oh. Duh." Teresa facepalmed. "Sorry, my SCV."

Roy nodded. "That could work. Let's go then."

Teresa grumbled as she got up. "No rest for the wicked, I guess."

"Oh, you could rest if you want to." Roy said, tension entering his voice as he began to pry open the door to the loading bay. "You would just, _ugh_, rest forever, if you catch my drift."

"Yeah yeah. Let's just get outta here then, okay?"

With a last grunt, the door was open. "Right this way." Roy said, gesturing her through.

When they were inside, Teresa gave a small yelp and rushed to her SCV. "Oh no! Kate, are you okay?" The SCV seemed to have suffered some small structural damage from being slammed into the wall. "It's okay, Teresa's gonna fix you up right after we get outta here, okay?"

"Are you... talking... to your SCV?" Asked a slightly disturbed Roy.

"Shh!" She replied as she climbed into the SCV's cockpit. She flexed her fingers, then started the engine. In a moment, the SCV had whirred to life.

"You might want to move a little." She said to Roy, who quickly moved out of the way as the large machine clanked to the side of the ship.

She pulled back the SCV's drill arm and punched.

After making a large hole in the wall, Teresa and Roy found themselves out in the blinding sunlight of a very green-looking planet. Three figures stood watching them, less than a hundred feet away.

"Uh, hello!" Teresa said with a wave.

Roy, on the other hand (who had somehow managed to recover his rifle) assumed a defensive posture. "Who are you?"

They were a very strange group.

There was the largest one, with a red and white armor suit the size of a Marauder and a hammer bigger than Teresa.

The one with the robotic arms sticking out of his back was particularly strange, with the rest of his body contained in red robes and robotic enhancement braces, and he held a rather large cannon in his hands.

The last, though the shortest, stood in the center as the clear leader, radiating an aura of confidence and intimidation. Roy knew this would be the person to talk to/eliminate if necessary. Teresa really wanted her hat.

The one with the hat smiled. "You are a presumptuous one, aren't you? Very well. We are the harbingers of the almighty imperium of man, saviors come to bless you with the light of the emperor which you sorely lack. He," she pointed to the giant one, "is Arcturus Typhan, an Astartes Terminator of the Blood Ravens. He," she pointed to the one with the robot arms, "is Artisan Narkos Mossk of the Tech Priests of Mars. I am Maresia, Inquisitor of the Ordo Malleus and representative of the Imperium of man. We demand you guide us unto whatever pitiful lordling you of this system owe fealty to."

"Uh..." The terrans glanced at each other.

"Could you repeat that, please? Except less... uh... confusing?" Teresa asked.

Maresia frowned. "You find comprehension of mine vocabulary problematic? Very well, I shall endeavor to utilize a more common variety of descriptors. Ahem.

We serve the mighty emperor of the imperium of man. Take us to your pitiful leader."

The two terrans exchanged a different glance. Somehow, Teresa had become their spokesperson. "Look, uhm, we have no idea where we are. Could you guys direct us to the nearest spaceport?"

Maresia's frown deepened. "We have just arrived here. Why would you ask us for direction?"

"Oh!" The puzzle pieces clicked together in Teresa's head. "You didn't happen to come here through some kind of portal-y thing, did you?"

A surprised inquisitorial eyebrow inched up. "Indeed, through some treacherous demonic sorcery we were pulled through the warp."

"Okay! Well, I don't really know about demons or sorcery or anything, but we definitely came through some sort of weird port-"

At this time, the shuttle exploded rather loudly, knocking the SCV onto its 'face' and throwing Roy several feet.

"Crap! Uh, hey, can somebody help me here?" Came Teresa's voice from the SCV.

The space marine looked at the inquisitor, who nodded assent, and then walked over to the fallen vehicle, lifting it back up with ease.

"Wow," Teresa said, rubbing dirt off of her face, "you're... really strong."

The space marine chuckled. "Indeed, young one."

Teresa grinned. "My name's Teresa." She stuck out her hand, then immediately thought the better of it. "That guy over there spitting out dirt is Roy."

The one spitting out dirt stood up. "If you're not from here, and we're not from here, I'd still bet that there's somebody from here, and whoever they are they just heard that blast. I think we should leave."

The inquisitor grinned wolfishly. "Leave? Whatever for? If we stay here, they will come. If they be friends we shall greet them. Be they heretics or xenos, we shall cast them down. There is truly no reason to leave."

"That... I don't think that's a good idea." Roy glanced up at Teresa.

"I don't know, Ghost dude, I think it would be a good idea to try to make some friends. We don't know where we are, we don't know where to go, we don't even have food! Why not just give it a chance?"

The Ghost's eyes narrowed for a moment, but conceded with a sigh. "Whatever. I guess we wait."

****2185CE-1230ET-HORIZON ORBIT-TERMINUS SYSTEMS-REAPERVERSE****

Cortana was growing worried.

In the past half hour, a blip had appeared. A blip that was growing steadily closer. She'd noticed signals coming from the planet below, originating at what appeared to be some sort of colony. They were very strange, but she had begun deciphering them and was almost certain that they were human. This, of course, meant that an unidentified vessel type running dark was now rapidly approaching a

human colony.

Suddenly, she noticed a small human ship break out of orbit to investigate the strange object. A moment later, it was destroyed.

It was in sight range, now, a strange and alien looking ship(not that that said all that much) that appeared similar to an elongated asteroid impaled with metal struts.

This was, of course, the time to wake up the chief.

As Master Chief popped open the hatch Cortana was already feeding him information.

"There's good news and bad news Chief. The good news is, we're in orbit above some sort of colony that I think may be human."

"And the bad news?"

"There is a hostile and unknown vessel approaching it at a rapid pace. It's going to pass by in five minutes."

"I've got an idea."

"Oh don't tell me..."

"We've got a plane to catch."

****2185CE-2240ET-**_**NORMANDY SR2**_**-EN ROUTE TO
HORIZON-REAPERVERSE****

Shepard decided to try again. She'd been attempting to distract herself, touring the ship, chatting with the crew. There were only so many times Garrus could tell you he had calibrations to make before it got really, very boring. There was no way around it, she had to try to sleep.

Okay. Round two. Sitting down on the bed...

Laying down on the bed...

Bing! Her cabin door slid open. "Shepard! The Illusive man has sent me a very important message for you-"

"Aaaaaaugh." Shepard groaned.

"Really, Commander?"

"Just shut up and read the report."

"Those are contradictory orders, commander,"

Shepard shot Miranda a bloodshot glare. Miranda got on with the report.

"Uhm, well, it seems that Horizon is about to be hit by the Collectors-"

"WHAT!"

3. Battle for Horizon

****Salutations, dear readers! This is the first author's note I have done, as I usually prefer to get on to the story, and it will be pretty brief.****

****As I'm sure you guys have probably assumed, I own none of the fantastic and creative universes I have drawn from, only my own OC's. Thanks to you guys who review/have reviewed... without you my procrastination levels would be infinite.****

****(Every review gives you 100 more war assets towards defeating the Reapers!)****

****Mysterious guest reviewer: Yes. Yes it is.****

****Lord Inquisitor B Joseph H: Indeed they are quite OP. Don't worry, though. It is not going to be an imperial stomp the entire fic... rest assured I do not plan on nerfing or buffing any particular group to compensate, but there will be balancing factors as time goes on.****

****Thanks for reading this far. I hope you enjoy the story.****

****Hail the Emperor.****

****Valar Morghulis.****

****2185CE-1225KT-HORIZON SURFACE-TERMINUS SYSTEMS-REAPERVERSE****

It hadn't taken long for someone to come looking.

Only a minute or two had passed since the explosion, and the strange assortment of Terrans and Imperials had just noticed a small shuttlecraft("Or a fighter_._" The Ghost muttered) making its way across the plain. It came to a landing a short distance away from the group, and out of it climbed five human-looking figures in armor that no one present recognized. One of them, a woman in white and pink armor, was clearly the leader, obvious through posture and interactions, passively picking up stray thoughts, or the fact that she was the only one not wearing a helmet, depending on who was making the observation.

"All right," The woman said, "Who the hell are you!?"

"I am Inquisitor Maresia of the Ordo-"

Teresa coughed loudly, interrupting the Inquisitor. "Oh, sorry Maresia. Hello!" She said with a bright smile as she turned back towards the leader of the new group. "We're sort of... uh... lost. Our ship kind of crashed-" Teresa pointed towards the now raging inferno behind them, "and I think we could use a bit of help. Would you mind telling us where we are?"

The woman scowled. "Bullshit. No way in the frigging universe does someone 'accidentally' crashland on a Terminus system colony. Tell me who the hell you are or I'll have my squad blow your heads off here and now." The 'squad raised their guns to shoulder level, aiming squarely for the heads of the group members.

The Inquisitor's eyes narrowed. "You would dare threaten us? You and your pitiful 'squad' would be mere-"

Teresa dissolved into a flurry of coughs. "Heh... sorry. Gunk in my throat. Anyways," she continued with a nervous glance at the guns, "I'm Teresa. The one in the hat is Maresia. The big guy is... er... what was your name again?"

'the big guy' glanced bemusedly at her. "Arcturus. Arcturus Typhan." His grip had tightened slightly on the hilt of his hammer, which he had been shifting casually from a relaxed position on his shoulder to a more ready stance. He doubted the small arms these people held could do any damage to the finely crafted armor he wore, but he disliked the idea of any of his companions coming to harm, and he was best able to express that dislike through his hammer.

"Right, thanks! And that robot-y guy-" She continued.

"I don't care about your god-damned names! Who do you work for?" The very rude woman asked.

"Uhm..." Teresa was not really sure how to answer that, especially considering that 'they' were not technically together.

The Inquisitor's eyes blazed. "We serve the holy Emperor of the almighty Imperium of Man, fighting to cleanse the universe of the foul heretic, the despicable xeno, and the unfathomly vile forces of chaos, and if you dare to oppose us we shall cleanse it of you foul hea-"

"_AAAAACHOOO!_" Teresa sneezed.

Maresia glared up at her. "Your bodily expletives are beginning to annoy me. I demand you cease with these interr-"

"So!" Teresa interrupted, causing the Inquisitor to scowl, "Aaaaanyways... yeah. They're with the, um, Imperium, I guess... I'm a Terran."

"What the hell is a terran?" The rude lady continued. If Teresa had not grown up with miners and mechanics, she was sure her ears would bleed from all the cursing this woman was doing. She wondered if the lady had had enough coffee that morning. "And who the unholy shit is the Imperium of Men?" Continued the rude lady.

"Man." The Inquisitor growled. "It could be your salvation, or, as your _current_ actions seem to be showing, your destruction, you loathsome, pitiful whor-"

"-Orrible weather today, isn't it?" Teresa quickly interrupted, earning yet another annoyed growl from the Inquisitor. "Well, actually, it's quite nice, but anyways..."

Meanwhile, the Space Marine observed with a mix of mild amusement and trepidation. He was surprised that the girl was still alive. If she had not been so young, or had she been under her command, the Inquisitor would have likely beheaded her by this point for such insubordination. Not that it wasn't still a likely possibility.

He was also surprised by how well she seemed to be handling the situation. Imperial talks with was usually only a trap, a ruse, or ended quickly in blood and death, so by his standards they were going spectacularly. There was some word for it... possibly starting with a D? It had been used often on ancient Terra. "Desecration?" He muttered to himself. "No, that cannot be correct... possibly 'dissection'? No... not decapitation either... 'discrimination'?"

Back at the main conversation...

"So, yeah." Teresa continued. "To sum that up, I'm a Terran, you're a terran, we're all terrans. Unless you're, like, a protoss or zerg or something."

The rude woman blinked. "That... is the biggest load of bullshit I've ever heard."

Teresa frowned. "Hey, I'm telling the truth! What do you call yourself if not 'terrans'?"

The rude woman raised a mocking eyebrow. "Humans. Duh." She glared at the Inquisitor. "I still see no reason not to shoot you all where you stand. I'm feeling generous today, so I'll give you one last chance before I splatter your pretty little brains all over that weird robot thing you're sitting in. _Talk._"

Teresa's face paled. "L-look, I'm _serious_! We were flying away from a zerg swarm when we went through a weird portal thing and-"

"Bull. Fucking. Shit." The rude lady raised the large gun she held to point directly at Teresa's face.

"N-no!" Teresa said, hating her nervous stutter. If that woman fired... SCV windshields could take being hit by rubble and a bullet or two, but direct machine gun fire (she assumed it was probably a machine gun) would break through it in seconds. "P-please, wait! This is a mistake-"

"Indeed." Said the Inquisitor, though she now grinned wolfishly. She drew her saber slowly from her scabbard and pointed it directly towards the extremely rude woman (who had neglected to even return the courtesy of her name! The nerve.) "A mistake that you will not long survive."

The imbecilic woman glared back at the inquisitor. "Are you threatening me? With a _sword_?" She gave a mirthless laugh. "You're crazy. I've got a squad of five people with assault rifles, and you're threatening me with a fucking _sword._ And you!" She turned her glare to the giant figure. "Trying to be some sort of goddamned space knight? Well nice armor, I hope it can take a _hand grenade_."

The inquisitor burst out into uncontrollable laughter.

"What the _hell_ _is_ so funny, you psychotic bitch!?" The rude woman yelled.

"Oh, I'm sorry." Maresia choked out through the occasional chuckle, not sounding sorry in the least. "It's just that... heheh... I've

never seen anyone foolish enough to threaten an Astartes Terminator with low grade explhohohsives-" She dissolved into laughter again, clutching a hand to her chest.

"You're insane." The rude lady scoffed, lining up her rifle with Teresa again. "And now, you're going to be dead."

"Oh really?" The inquisitor said with mocking cheeriness. "All _five_ of us?"

The rude lady's eyes widened. "_Five_? What-"

click

Ashley froze, feeling cold metal touch the back of her head.

"Drop. Your. Gun." A voice growled in her ear.

Ashley dropped her gun.

"Chief?" One of her soldiers said tentatively. "What are you-"

"Tell them to lower their weapons" The voice said. She could feel his breath on the back of her neck.

"Lower your weapons." Ashley had been completely alert. How could this have happened? It didn't matter now, though. Ashley wasn't about to let her family's reputation be sundered even more by another failure.

With the speed of an experienced combatant she turned and ducked, lashing out with one foot in an attempt to kick out the legs of-

Ashley blinked. There was no one there.

At least she thought that there wasn't until she felt something slam into her shoulder, knocking her to the ground and keeping her there with increased pressure.

It was then Ashley saw something that made even less sense than the rest of her day.

Empty space shimmered and dissolved into teal hexagons, which disappeared rapidly, revealing an extremely intimidating armored figure holding a silenced rifle with a barrel inches away from her face.

"Stay down," the man said in a voice that crackled slightly through the audio projectors of his mask, "or I will splatter your 'pretty little brains' all over the ground."

"SCV!" He called without looking up. "You've been taking the lead here. It's your call. Do we try again or take them out?"

Teresa let out a sigh of relief. She'd almost been a goner there. "Look, Mrs. Soldier lady-hey, what is your name, anyways?"

"There's no way I'm going to-ugnh!" The Ghost put more weight on her shoulder. "Fine! Chief of Operations Ashley fucking Williams! Happy

now?"

"Well," Teresa said. "I'd be happier if we could just talk about this peacefully with no death threats or violence- but anyways, Ashley, we really don't want to fight-" She glanced at the Inquisitor. "Okay, scratch that. Look, all we want is to know where we are and how to get back to where we used to be. Would you please help us?"

"There is no way in-" Ashley began.

"Ahem." The sound came from the tech priest. Those assembled glanced at him in surprise. "This conversation has been pointless. I advise we currently direct our attention to a higher priority occupation."

"Oh?" The Inquisitor said with an eyebrow raised. "And what would that be?"

In response, the cyborg simply pointed towards the sky. Specifically, the small brown dot that had grown significantly in the sky over the past few minutes unnoticed by those below but for the cyborg.

"It appears to be a small landing craft of some sort." The tech priest elaborated.

"_Small_!?" Ashley exclaimed. "That thing is the size of a cruiser!" Her face had gone extremely pale. "Oh no... you need to let me up, now!"

"Whatever for?" The Inquisitor asked with a skeptical eyebrow.

"We need to get out of here! I don't care how insane you idiots are, those things might be the Collectors, and unless I get back to the colony right fucking now we're all screwed!" The men Ashley had brought with her were visibly shaken.

"Well, OK then, as long as you promise not to shoot at us I guess." Teresa said with a shrug.

"And if this is a trap?" The Inquisitor asked. "Say they are trying to get us to let our guard down?"

"Look, you're just going to have to trust me on this one, because we _seriously_ _need_ to go right now."

"We can do more than that." The Ghost said.

"Wha-what the hell!?" Ashley shouted. "What was that!?" She'd felt... something... in her head, almost as if a secretary was going through her memory files.

"She's telling the truth." The Ghost said with a sigh, taking his boot off of the woman's shoulder. He seemed slightly disappointed.

"What the heck, Ghost dude?" Teresa said incredulously. "Did you just-"

"Nevermind." He interrupted. "Now, Chief Williams, are you going to get going or not?"

Ashley scowled as she brushed herself off, but did not reply to him. "Alright, people, let's move!" She glanced back at them. "Get to the colony if you want to live. You don't want to get caught out in the open."

They watched in silence as the shuttlecraft began to speed towards the aforementioned colony.

"Well that was weird." The SCV pilot commented. "Oi, Ghostman, did you just break into that woman's mind?"

The green eyes of his mask stared back at her. "What of it?"

Teresa crossed her arms. "Not cool, dude. You can't just go reading people's minds. Major breach of privacy."

"If you don't like it, find some tinfoil and make yourself a hat. In the mean time, we need to go." He turned to the other three. "Are you coming?"

"Indeed." The inquisitor said. "We cannot simply stand by and allow a human colony to be attacked. Besides," she added with a malicious grin, "I feel like killing something today."

**2185CE-1235ET-HORIZON ORBIT-TERMINUS
SYSTEMS-REAPERVERSE**

"Chief." Cortana said as Master Chief jumped down the last ladder.

"Hmm?"

"This is a bad idea."

"Yep."

"This is the fifth time I've said that. I'm starting to think you're not listening to me."

"I'm listening." He'd reached the door to the airlock. "Do you have a better idea?"

"...Oookay, point taken. Still, is blowing up the ship really necessary?"

"We can't let the ship fall into enemy hands. You know the rules." He entered the airlock. It looked similar, if smaller, than the one he'd used to give the Covenant back their bomb over Earth.

"Well, yes, but what if the blast kills us?"

"It will get us to the other ship."

"Yes, but what if it kills us?"

The Chief grabbed the switch. "It won't."

"You don't know that."

"Trust me, Cortana." The Chief grabbed hold of the release latch.
"Did you prime the reactor?"

"Is the space pope catholic?"

"...Space pope?"

"I see we still have more work to do on your sense of humor. Yes, the reactor's ready to go anytime."

The Chief pulled the release latch. As soon as the door was fully opened the Chief pushed off from the wall towards the rapidly nearing spaceship. "Now."

The ship exploded in the brilliant blue of a slipspace explosion, propelling the Chief rapidly towards the strange ship. The Chief maneuvered his legs to face its hull, aiming the RPG he'd picked up on his way down directly at its hull.

"Tell me when, Cortana."

The Chief zoomed towards the Collector vessel, its craggy hull approaching like a truck whose windshield he-the Chief decided not to finish that analogy.

"Now, Chief!" The Chief pulled the trigger, blasting a rocket through the side of the ship he would have slammed into a moment later.

"Brace for impact!"

****2185CE-1236ET-COLLECTOR VESSEL-HORIZON ORBIT-TERMINUS
SYSTEMS-REAPERVERSE****

A group of Collectors had been headed for the mobilization bay when the hull in front of them exploded.

As the smoke began to clear, they saw a crouched figure. A hulking, green armored figure, with a golden mask that seemed to be glaring directly at them.

They, of course, opened fire.

"Well they're not very friendly." Cortana said to the Chief, who had taken cover behind a strange organic seeming column.

The Chief drew his shotgun. "Neither am I."

cha-chic

****2185CE-1238TT-HORIZON COLONY-HORIZON SURFACE-TERMINUS
SYSTEMS-REAPERVERSE****

"Well this is disappointing." Maresia muttered.

They had arrived at the so-called 'Colony' to find a rather pathetic shantytown(in the Inquisitor's eyes) whose defenses seemed to be sorely lacking.

"Damn it, we need every able bodied person up and armed!" The annoyance known as Ashley was shouting. The defense force they had mustered was so meager that she actually felt somewhat embarrassed for them.

Strangely enough, the girl in the mech(Teresa, if memory served) was proving extremely useful constructing a barricade, embellishing it with strange bunker-like structures. She did in thirty seconds what would've taken four men at least five minutes. Whether this was innate to the girl or due to the machine was unclear, and warranted further observation.

In any case, the strange enemy ship had only just entered the upper atmosphere. The brief story she'd been given had stirred an old rage against the xenos. These colonies might have been small, but allowing them to be taken one by one and doing nothing about it was a grievous crime. No genocidal alien scum would be allowed to live on her watch. She would ensure that they were annihilated to the last molecule, and afterwards she would 'discuss' this negligence with those responsible.

"Look sharp, people! They should be here in less than five minutes!"

Emperor be praised.

Maresia turned from her position on top of the barricade where she had been looking over the field to the location of their enemies to face the assembled troops.

"People of the colony of Horizon!" She proclaimed, turning heads across the plaza.

"Ma'am, what do you think you're-" Ashley began.

"You are about to face the vile xeno in combat." Maresia continued, ignoring the now annoyed Ashley. "These foes will show no mercy. If they had their way, they would execute you, and your families, and your friends, and desecrate your remains with their unholy stench. All of those you know would be slain, their guts lying at their feet, their eyes stabbed out, their screams echoing across the planet!" A considerable number of the faces in the crowd were now paled.

"Stop this goddamned-" Ashley tried again.

"But fear not!" Maresia proclaimed. "For we stand before them! So long as we hold true and do not yield, they will not have their victory! The almighty Emperor stands with us, granting us the unstoppable sword of his wrath and the invulnerable shield of his wisdom! Heed now your weapons, your armor, and go to battle with joy in your hearts-for on this day we shall be victorious!"

Though somewhat confused about this 'emperor', the assembled defenders felt a sudden peace and confidence grow within them, and at the end of the speech their cheers could be heard miles away.

"Well that was annoying." The Ghost muttered as he checked his rifle for the third time. He found the Inquisitor's religion very strange... but then again everything here seemed to be strange. Their weapons, armor, and technology were all completely alien to anything

he'd encountered before, and none of the minds he'd glanced over had held any knowledge of the Dominion, let alone the Zerg and the Protoss. He hadn't even tried any of the Imperials-he could feel that both the Inquisitor and the armored giant were psionic, and trying to read other psychics was generally a bad idea. That aside, he didn't need to read their minds to know they were clearly not familiar with his world.

He glanced up from scanning the battlefield to observe the now more enthusiastic colonists join him on the barricade. He had been very skeptical about their choice in armor, appearing more like a jumpsuit than true marine armor. He doubted that they would stand up to any sort of gunfire. He had, however, learned(while perusing the surface thoughts of a civilian) that they had some sort of shielding.

They weren't soldiers, though. The majority, at least, were minimally trained civilians. This fight was going to be tough.

He still was not certain what to think about the Imperial's choice of weapon.

"Damn it, you psychotic idiot, you can't fight with a sword!" Ashley was yelling.

"Care to put that to the test?" The Inquisitor replied.

Roy concluded that either she was extremely capable... or a complete idiot. They'd find out soon enough.

The Collector ship had grown significantly closer, and Roy could see strange clouds moving out from it. "They may be using chemical weapons. All of your helmets have air filters, yes?"

The person crouching next to him gave him a confused look. "Of course. Who would wear a helmet without air filters?"

"Just checking." He brought his hand up to his mask and zoomed in for a closer look at the clouds. "Wait- Inquisitor, those are insects!"

"Oh?" She replied, glancing skyward.

"If they swarm us..." The Ghost did not like these odds. "Anyone got a plan?"

"We've got GUARDIAN laser emplacements. If we can get them fully active we might be able to-" Ashley began.

"No need." The Inquisitor interrupted. "Typhan, if anything tries to attack me while I'm distracted, kill it." The Space Marine nodded.

She then looked up towards the sky, closing her eyes in an expression of fierce concentration.

"What are you-" Ashley was interrupted as Maresia flung a hand in her face.

"Not. Now." The Inquisitor said through clenched teeth.

Roy began to feel a powerful buildup of psychic energy, centered on the Inquisitor. In the material world a wind began to pick up around her.

And suddenly, the swarms began to writhe, joining together in a gigantic cloud. Insect carcasses began to fall, crunching as they hit the ground and splattering strange slime where they hit.

When Roy looked closely at the swarms, he realized that they were tearing each other apart. "Interesting." Said Roy. "Haven't seen that one before..."

In the meantime, the alien ship landed with a loud thump. Figures began to emerge, flying rapidly towards their position.

"This is it, people!" Ashley shouted. "Wait until they're in range, then fire at will!"

Roy eyed the approaching enemy. There were a lot of them, but they were flying towards their line with no apparent deviations in their course. They're sitting ducks, he thought as he drew up his rifle. Time to go hunting.

The Dominion Ghost opened fire. His first shot went through one of the alien's bizarre heads, blue shields flashing and failing as the creature fell out of the sky. His second went through another alien's head, and his third eviscerated yet another. This is easy. Roy continued to fire.

Then, however, the strange aliens began to fire back. Their strange laser weapons tore chunks out of the barricade, forcing those on it to duck under cover. One man screamed as a beam blasted a hole in his stomach and pushed him over the side, where he landed with a crunch. A woman fell silently, a blackened hole where her face had been.

"Open fire!" Ashley yelled. The colonists popped over the barricade, opening fire with assault rifles and SMG's. The Collectors tried to dodge, but in the air they were easy targets. As they started to die in earnest, they began to fall back.

"We've won!" A colonist shouted, pumping his fist in the air.

"No, wait, they're not done yet!" Ashley shouted.

"Hold fast, defenders of Horizon!" Maresia shouted. She looked slightly drained from her slaughter of the swarms, but the last of them had fallen a moment before and her sword was in her hand. "Indeed, this is only the first step on the path to victory!"

"But they're falling ba-" An orange beam lanced through the man's chest, cutting off his protest, and the Collectors were advancing. This time, however...

"What is that noise?" Someone asked.

Ashley's expression had hardened. "Husks!"

Roy glanced back at the battlefield, where he saw something that made even his stomach churn. They looked like they had once been human,

but now had been infected with machines, their eyes empty and glowing. They seemed to be screaming with synthesized rage, their voices multiplied by the dozens.

Roy started to fire again, taking out a husk with every shot. It didn't seem to make a difference, however. For every one he killed, there seemed to be five more, charging on like monsters from a nightmare. They were getting closer.

When they were in range, the colonists opened fire. They managed to hold them back, mowing down the husks long before they reached the barricade. Just when the situation seemed to have stabilized, however, the Collectors began to fly back in again. Colonists all along the line began to fall as the aliens picked them off, causing those around them to refocus their fire on the Collectors.

As more and more colonists focused on the Collectors, the husks began to get through...

"Damnit!" The Ghost cursed, blasting one of the howling monsters at point blank range. "We're being overrun!"

The three bunkers Teresa had built into the side of the barricade were holding back some of the husks, but colonists were already starting to die. Roy grimaced, but continued to rapidly kill off Collectors.

Then, out of the corner of his eye, he saw a strange sight.

Arcturus Typhan had had enough of these strange creatures, and had charged up and over the barricade, leaping off of the top. "FEEL THE WRATH OF THE EMPEROR, XENO SCUM!" He roared, hammer over his head.

A moment later the ground shook with the force and sound of thunder, blasting a gaping hole in the husk's ranks and sending many of them flying into the air, some slamming into collectors and knocking them out of the sky.

Standing from where he'd landed, the Astartes raised his hammer again and charged.

Behind him, the inquisitor leaped down as well, landing feet first on a husk and crushing its mechanical spine. She charged after the space marine, her saber becoming a whirlwind of steel as she nimbly leaped and dodged over, under and through the horde of husks, leaving severed heads and limbs in her wake.

Immediately, a group of collectors broke off, firing their strange weapons at the pair. When they hit the Space Marine, however, no shields flared as they had been expecting, yet their shots seemed to glance off. The armor was not even scratched. The Inquisitor, on the other hand, could not even be hit. She was always gone by the time they fired, causing their weapons to cleave even further into the ranks of the husks.

Back at the barricade the situation had improved temporarily, but the alien horde was still coming.

Roy glanced at his ammo counter on the back of his rifle and cursed. He had, conservatively, only a minute of ammo left, with no way to

refill it. This fight was going to get interesting, and not in a good way.

****2185CE-1244ET-COLLECTOR VESSEL-HORIZON SURFACE-TERMINUS
SYSTEMS-REAPERVERSE****

"Behind you!"

The Chief glanced back, putting a magnum round through the face of one of the humanoid-machine-zombie creatures as he continued to sprint through the strange alien ship. He had been experiencing flashbacks to his battles with the flood, as the architecture of the ship was eerily similar and, of course, there were hordes of zombie-creatures inside of it.

"Door to your left!" The Chief jumped at the wall to his right, thrusting off of it with his legs and leaping through the door that Cortana closed half a second after he was through. He rolled as he landed, coming out of his roll at his previous running speed.

Behind him he heard the more and more distant sound of creatures clawing at the entrance. They would probably get through eventually, but he'd be long gone by then.

"Upper right and center!"

"I see them." The Chief rapidly holstered his magnum and drew his shotgun, perforating the two surprised aliens with one shot as he passed by them. He ran up a short incline, arriving at some sort of console. "This it?" He asked.

"I think so." Cortana said.

"You don't know?" The Chief asked, a miniscule note of worry entering his voice that only Cortana could detect.

"Hey, give me a break! I had to decipher an entire alien language on the way here!" She neglected to mention that it had been extremely easy, as one of the many programs she'd absorbed from the Forerunners was one for quickly translating alien languages. "I'm 99% certain. Well, maybe more like 96.5%. Whatever. Just plug me in already!"

With an inaudible sigh of exasperation, the Chief pulled Cortana's chip out of his head and placed her on top of the terminal on the spot he estimated to be a viable location.

"All right, I've got their main systems under control." Cortana said after a moment. "Hmm... I think I'm going to have a little fun."

"Don't get distracted, Cortana. Find us a way out of here."

Cortana's blue figure popped up from the chip, arms crossed. "Oh come on, chief! Can't a girl have a little fun?"

"..."

"I mean, we've been trapped on that stupid ship for so long and it's

just so good to finally have something to do!"

"Not really the place, Cortana..."

"Well, I just violently pressurized and murdered a bunch of aliens for you. You're welcome. You know, you never really thank me for what I do. If I didn't know better I'd think you don't appreciate me."

"Thank you."

"...sorry, Chief." Cortana rubbed her virtual face. "I haven't had anybody to talk to in years... it's been kind of lonely. Let's just get out of here, okay?"

The Chief nodded, plugging Cortana back into his head. "First door on your left."

****2185CE-1245KT-HORIZON COLONY-HORIZON SURFACE-TERMINUS
SYSTEMS-REAPERVERSE****

"Damn!" Roy exclaimed as he fired his last shot into another husk. He dropped his now spent rifle.

Might as well do some more weapons testing_.

He reached up to his upper gauntlet, pulling down a red switch.

With a flick of his psionic powers, the green jewel on his gauntlet glowed and a one and a three foot long triangular blade of glowing green energy blazed into existence out of the front of his gauntlet.

He turned as another husk leaped over the wall, slicing off its head with a swing of his arm.

"Holy crap!" A colonist standing next to him exclaimed as he struggled to turn on the other switch without accidentally cutting off his arm. "That's a fucking laser sword!"

The Ghost raised an eyebrow under his mask. "It's not a laser sword. It's a psi blade." He turned back towards the edge of the barricade as his second blade hummed to life.

"Same thing." The colonist muttered, glancing back at the horde of husks. "Hey, what are you even gonna do with-" He glanced back at the Ghost, only to see a foot disappearing into a ring of teal energy as it pushed off of the barricade.

...

"Die, unholy abominations!" Typhan roared, bringing his hammer down again in a blast of thunderous force and obliterating yet another group of husks.

Out of the corner of his eye, he could see the Inquisitor dancing her dance of death through the crowds of monstrosities. "Typhan!" She shouted. "We must return to the barricade! They are being overrun!"

"Their flood will cease once we annihilate the source!" He replied as he took another thunderous strike.

A small group of collectors flew down, firing their weapons uselessly into his armor. Suddenly, one of them began to glow, its skin glowing with cracks like a stream of lava. "***I AM THE HARBINGER OF YOUR DESTR-**"

"DIE, DEMON!" The space marine shouted, slamming his hammer down onto the face of the strange possessed alien, slamming it into the ground with enough force to crush a Leman Russ*.

(*an Imperial tank)

The Space marine watched the formerly possessed pile of ash and bone for a moment to make sure it wouldn't rise again and then broke the remaining Collector squad with relative ease.

Suddenly, however, he found himself back to back with the Inquisitor, surrounded by a circle of husks. The main horde continued to charge around them, but for the moment they had a reprieve.

A single collector, glowing as the past one had been, flew down to face the Inquisitor.

"**WHAT ARE YOU?*" The creature asked. The Inquisitor had thought it to be demonic at first, but she could not sense chaos in its aura, only a deep and harsh coldness.

"I could ask the same." She pointed her sabre at its face. "You are no demon- make yourself known, so that I may know what foul creatures to annihilate when I cleanse this sector."

"**WE ARE THE HARBINGER OF YOUR PERFECTION. WE ARE ETERNAL, THE PINNACLE OF EVOLUTION AND EXISTANCE. WE ARE BEYOND NAME, EACH A NATION UNTO OURSELVES, FREE OF ALL WEAKNESS. OUR EXHISTANCE TRANCENDS YOUR VERY UNDERSTANDING. THE PROTHEANS CALLED US REAPERS, A FUTILE ATTEMPT TO GIVE A NAME TO THEIR DESTRUCTION. WE CLEANSED THEM, AND ALL WHO CAME BEFORE. NOW HUMANITY AS WELL SHALL ASCEND AND BE CLEANSED. BUT YOU ARE DIFFERENT. WHAT ARE YOU?*"**

The Inquisitor grinned like a wolf. "I," she began, with a flourish of her glowing blade, "Am Inquisitor Maresia of the Ordo Malleus, a soldier of the Emperor's will! If you desire to destroy humanity, vile xeno, his wrath shall sing through me as I annihilate you and all of your 'eternal' kind."

"**I CARE NOT FOR YOUR PITIFUL RELIGION. YOU ARE DIFFERENT. YOUR MIND IS STRANGE AND UNKOWN TO ME.**" The Inquisitor could feel the creature prodding at the edges of her mind, trying to find a hole in her mental defenses. It's presence was oppressive and vile. _Two can play at that game, xeno._

The creature roared with rage as it felt her consciousness pierce deeply into its mind. Its consciousness was enormous, but it didn't have the speed to repel a psyche of her experience and power. What she found there... were horrors. Not the worst she had seen but incredibly vast in scale. "You..." An expression of utter loathing came across her face. "You will pay dearly for this."

"**WHAT HAVE YOU DONE? HOW IS THIS POSSIBLE? WE DEMAND AN ANSWER!**"
Strange blue energy began to glow around the creature.

"Here it is, then." The Inquisitor glared into its face. "You may have succeeded in this 'harvest' in the past. Now you face a far greater foe." She pointed her sabre towards the sky as she gathered her psychic energy around it. "The Imperium will not fall so easily, and we will not be fooled by your deceit. Our fleets are grander, our armies mightier. Your entire race has been doomed from the moment you met-"

Her monologue was interrupted as a glowing blue orb smashed into the alien's head and exploded, leaving only ash.

Through a channel he'd carved himself in the alien horde, an armored figure sprinted at incredible speed, only skidding to a halt inches away from the somewhat disappointed inquisitor.

"Oh. Hello." The Chief said.

"I wanted to finish that conversation." The Inquisitor replied.

The Chief shrugged, then turned to face the alien horde. "It doesn't usually end well if let them keep talking."

The three warriors charged into the fray once again as the strange creatures began to shake off their shock.

2185CE-1248ET-_**NORMANDY SR2**_**-TERMINUS
SYSTEMS-REAPERVERSE**

"We've arrived in system, commander!" Joker said over the intercom. "Looks like the Collectors have already gotten busy."

Shepard sighed, taking one last sip of her coffee. "Alright. Get us down there, Joker, we've got a colony to save."

"Aye commander." The intercom clicked off.

The Spectre rose from her seat in the mess, hardsuit clanking against the metal of her chair. With a nod to Sergeant Gardner, she made her way out. As she walked towards the elevator Miranda appeared beside her.

"As you know, commander, fighting off the Collectors is the main priority. Cerberus would also appreciate your acquiring any Collector tech lying around, as well as looking into the warp disturbances." Miranda said quickly.

"They weren't caused by the Collectors?" Shepard asked as they entered the elevator.

"We don't think so. In any case, I'm sure you'll find out soon enough. Who have you decided to bring with you?"

"Hmm." Shepard thought for a moment. "It's going to be some heavy fighting down there." They exited the elevator onto the hangar deck, where she turned to the nearest EDI terminal. "EDI, tell Garrus, Jack and Grunt to get down here ASAP. We're going hunting."

Miranda raised an eyebrow. "Four people, Shepard? I thought you preferred to work in threes. Something about a lucky number?"

Shepard shrugged. "We might be jumping into a horde of husks for all I know. I'm going to need some backup."

She began to walk towards the shuttle.

"Good luck." Miranda said as she waited for the elevator to return. Her eyes narrowed when the door opened to reveal the vibrantly tattooed ex-con biotic, arms crossed.

"Hey, cheerleader. Where'd your pom-poms go?"

"Same place as your childhood." The biotic scowled, bumping Miranda as she passed.

"Fuck you."

Garrus Vakarian and the hulking form of Grunt followed, the Turian sparing Miranda a quick glance.

As the elevator door closed, blocking the hangar from view, Miranda felt a strange sense of foreboding. It she felt that something big was going to happen, something important. She had no idea why.

****2185CE-1250KT-HORIZON COLONY-HORIZON SURFACE-TERMINUS
SYSTEMS-REAPERVERSE****

"Damn it!" Roy exclaimed as his cloaking generator failed again. It was supposed to be a permanent cloaking device, but evidently there were still several design flaws to be worked out. Not something you really wanted to learn when surrounded by angry robotic monsters who wanted to tear you to shreds.

This ran through his head as he flipped over the head of one such creature, slicing off its upper torso in the process. He landed in a crouch, springing up higher onto the barricade. He turned around in time to stab his right blade through the chest of a leaping monstrosity before kicking it off his blade and slicing through another of the beasts with the other one.

A collector shot slammed into his shoulder, pushing him down onto the barricade. It felt like being punched in the shoulder by a pro boxer, but his prototype Protoss-style shields held. He sprang back up, kicking a husk in the face and sending it barreling into a pile of its compatriots.

He took a moment to observe the rest of the barricade and did not like what he saw. Though the tide had been slowed somewhat, colonists were still being overwhelmed by their alien foe. Dozens of husks crawled up the barricade, many being killed by colonist gunfire and adding to the gigantic pile of mechanical dead that had been gathered there. It still wasn't enough. Even now a colonist he was too far away to help was grabbed by one husk as another tore out his throat, his companion screaming with rage and dousing the three of them with bullets.

He turned back to the rapidly advancing horde, cleaving another husk on his left and stabbing yet another through its face, then using it as a temporary shield as another Collector took a potshot in his general direction. They'd mostly withdrawn, he'd noticed bitterly. They were allowing their monstrosities to do their dirty work for them.

"Damn it, dude." The colonist from before said from where she crouched behind the top of the barricade. She'd been holding out well, but he could see the terror in her eyes. "We're... we're dead, aren't we?"

The Ghost kicked the husk corpse off of his blade and into another one still climbing up, starting a minor husk/corpse avalanche. "No. We're doing well."

The woman laughed despairingly. "Well, yeah, you are." She grinned almost psychotically. "Guess what?" She giggled. "I'm out of ammo."

The Ghost glanced at her. "You think that's funny?"

"No." She giggled again. He could tell she was barely holding onto her sanity. "One of those things is just going to come over and tear off my head and I'm gonna be dead like Andrew over there." She pointed to a nearby corpse. "Only reason it hasn't happened yet is cause you're here being a badass."

The Ghost glanced back down the pile of dead husks. They were coming again, but he had a moment at least. "Take his gun." He said.

"What?" The woman said.

"Your friend. Andrew, or whatever. Take his gun." He looked directly at her. "You have to fight."

The woman blinked, staring at him. "His... his gun." She leaned over, picking up the heavy pistol that lay beside the corpse. "He loved this damn thing..."

The Ghost flicked off his right energy blade and pulled his knife out of its sheath on his leg. "If that runs out... use this." He flipped it in his hand, catching it by the end of its long blade.

The woman stared at it for a moment, then eventually reached up and grasped its hilt. "Thank you." She said with her eyes locked on his, her face a mask of determination.

"Fight well." He said, flicking his second void blade back into existence. He turned back to the horde and resumed his work.

...

Teresa had been desperately trying to repair the barricade for the entire fight, frantically dodging the Collector's weaponry as Kate welded armor plates back in place. At that moment she was trying to repair a bunker that had taken lots of fire and was currently _on

_fire.

Then she heard a strange noise, like rolling thunderstrikes-

And suddenly her world was spinning and crashing and pain.

When her head finally stopped spinning, she looked around her and felt a growing dread.

The bunker she'd been trying so hard to repair had been completely smashed, leaving only a smoking crater behind. Kate the SCV had landed on its side and had been half buried in rubble. Her systems were blinking red, legs totally shot. The rubble they'd been buried in had them pinned to the ground.

Then she noticed a small bit of red dripping down her nose. She reached up to her forehead and felt a small cut that was pumping out way more blood than she was comfortable with. The skin around it was tender and bruising up quickly. She glanced around and found the edge she must have slammed her head on.

She checked over the rest of herself and was glad to find only bruises and small scrapes. She popped open the first aid kit that was attached to the wall and received a shower of first aid materials for her trouble. (In hindsight, opening the first aid kit on the wall that was now the ceiling was not a good idea.)

She sifted through the medical material and was rewarded with a clean roll of bandages, which she quickly tied around her forehead. Satisfied, she looked back up from the pile of random stuff on the floor and found herself face to face with a husk.

...

Roy had just cut down another husk when he heard the explosion. He glanced over at where the bunker used to be and noticed the form of the SCV half buried under rubble. Suddenly, he felt a strange sense of sadness building up within him.

He slashed through several more husks but for some reason his gaze continued to be drawn to the smoldering wreckage. The strange girl had been annoying, yes, but she had not deserved death at all.

Then he heard the scream.

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH GET AWAY GET AWAY GET AWAY YOU GORRAM ROBOT ZOMBIE FREAK!"

There was no one else that could be.

Suddenly the Ghost found himself sprinting to the fallen mech, hacking a path through the monstrous horde.

...

It was times like this that Teresa wished she had a gun.

Her dad had told her she'd need to be older before he'd let her own one, of course. Not that that seemed like a good reason at all right now. But though she didn't have a gun, that did not mean she didn't

have any weapons.

In other news, she had discovered a new use for her favorite wrench.

"Die! DIE! How are you not dead yet?" With a final smash to the face the battered husk finally fell. "Yeah! Take that you stupid-" Teresa glanced up.

Two growling husks were closing in rapidly, their glowing eyes staring into hers.

"Weeeeeell crap."

Then she felt a rush of wind behind her and a shadow passed over her head, slamming into the two creatures and pushing them to the ground.

The shadow stood and turned, synthetic fluids dripping off of its armor and green blades glowing. Its green eyes stared into hers.

"...hey, Ghost dude." Teresa couldn't really think of anything else to say.

"You are unharmed?" His voice crackled through his mask.

"Uh... yeah, I guess." She gripped her wrench tightly as she heard the howls of more approaching husks.

"Then let's go." He flicked off one of his blades.

"Hey wait, what are you-" the breath was knocked out of her as he sprinted forward, catching her with his arm and throwing her onto his shoulder. "What the heck are you doing! Put me down you jerk!" He began to run at the pace of a genetically modified assassin with a horde of guards on his tail.

She noticed the rather large horde of husks swarming behind them. "Okay, nevermind! Don't put me down!"

Above them, she noticed, a strange, carapaced creature floated. As she watched, it launched another thunder-like attack, blowing up a second bunker. "Oh, come on!"

Then, suddenly, it was hit by a blast of bluish light, which burned through its shell and made it explode violently.

She turned her head to glance at its source, which turned out to be the strange red-robed priest. He continued to adjust the weapon he held as one of his mechanical arms fired at the hordes with a strange gun and the other stabbed through any husks that got too close.

Huh. Maybe we're not so screwed after all.

The Ghost finally stopped after they'd reached the top of the barricade, dropping her down abruptly.

"Ow." She said, rubbing away the pain. "Hey, Ghost dude, what are you

doing?"

He was glancing around as if looking for something, only stopping when his eyes fell on a pile of husks. He walked over to it, pulling several of them off before revealing the grinning corpse of a female colonist, her hand still gripping a knife driven through a husks face.

Teresa felt bile building in her throat. She'd done her best to avoid looking at the bodies. "You know her?"

The Ghost pried the knife out of her hands and tore it out of the creature's skull. "No." He replied.

He turned to her, flipping it so that the handle faced her. "Take this. You'll need it."

Teresa raised an eyebrow but took the knife. It was big, half the length of a machete, and made for severing bone. "Thanks. So, what now?"

He turned back to face the horde, green blades snapping to life. "Now we fight."

...

Maresia was growing tired. She'd long lost count of the monstrosities she'd slain, her sword cutting them down like wheat. Yet there were so many still-less so than before, as the mounds of corpses could attest to, but still many-and the Harbinger creature was proving troublesome.

"**YOU SHALL FALL, AS ALL BEFORE YOU HAVE.**" The foul thing proclaimed as it hurled another blast of whirling blue energy at the Inquisitor, an attack she easily dodged, though slightly more slowly than she had before.

"NOT today, monster!" She gave in to her fury and unleashed a blast of psionic lighting, lancing into and incinerating Harbinger's current host. They were only puppets, however, and she knew that thing would return shortly.

Typhan had thoroughly smashed his way throughout the body of the collector forces, annihilating almost one third of the total husk horde and many Collectors in the process. His hammer strikes deafened any who drew too close. Of all of the forces defending the colony, he was doing the most damage.

Almost all of them.

"Duck!" Cortana shouted. The Chief complied, sliding forward on his knees under a tremendous laser blast from a weapon appearing similar to a Spartan laser, a weapon he promptly tore out of its owners hands as he leapt up and dashed its brains out with a strike from the butt of his magnum. Holding the laser cannon in one hand he activated it, slashing a large group of husks in half.

"Ooh, fun!" Cortana said. "Upper right!"

"I see it." One of the large floating things was up there, looking

ready to fire its strange laser beam eyes at him. He promptly fired the laser weapon at it, though it seemed to have some sort of powerful shielding and the laser quickly ran out of energy. Hurling it away, the Chief pulled out a plasma grenade.

The monstrous thing, which seemed to stare at him with the faces of dozens of husks fused together, fired its lasers.

The Master Chief glanced at his shield bar. It was going down, though not as quickly as he'd expected.

The Chief primed the grenade and hurled it onto the creature. It exploded with blue light, tearing a gaping hole in the side of the thing and sending it crashing to the ground and landing on some unfortunate collectors.

The Chief pulled out his shotgun and continued to run, dodging left and right through the alien forces and generally laying waste to their hordes. This was going to be a long day.

...

When the shuttle dropped down into sight range, there was only one thing to say.

"What. The. Fuck." Said Jack.

"Yeah, I'm inclined to agree with you on this one." Shepard said.

What lay below them could only be described as a battlefield. The colonists had barricaded the main road into the colony and had apparently been defending it extremely well, given the enormous amount of Collector and husk corpses strewn around it. Outside the city there seemed to be at least three strange figures fighting in the middle of a giant and mostly dead(er) horde of husks.

"Put us down in the Colony, behind the barricade." Shepard said.

"That looks like a good fight! I can't wait!" Grunt said with a krogan grin.

"Yeah, me too! It's been way too long since I last killed someone." Jack said.

"What's the plan, Sheppard?" Garrus asked.

"Well... we go down there, find out what in the name of the almighty space illama is happening, and shoot some stuff."

Garrus chuckled. "You are truly a mastermind, Sheppard."

Shepard smirked. "Yeah yeah, Vakarian. Keep on laughing. Just don't come calling next time you're drunk out of your mind and being chased by a lovesick Salarian begging you to, what was it again, 'take me to the stars my shining prince'?"

The turian attempted to imitate a pout. "I thought we'd agreed to never mention that again, Commander."

Sheppard shrugged. "Hey, it's not like they're listening."

"I'm sooooo gonna kill way more than you!"

"Heh. Big words from such a puny human."

"You wanna go?"

"Guys," Shepard called, "I'm sure you're both going to kill plenty of things once we get out there, would you mind not starting a fight in here?" She waved a gloved hand at the pair. "I still reserve the right to personally chuck you off of this ship!"

"Yeah, right, Shepard. Like you'd ever fucking follow through with that."

Shepard's eyes narrowed. "Jack. I have not slept. For several days. Messing with me right now is not a good idea."

Jack decided to stop talking.

When the shuttle landed, the hatch popped open to reveal-

"Shepard?" Ahsley said, lowering her rifle.

"Ash?" Shepard had not known what to expect, but seeing Ashley was not even on the list of possibilities. "Ash! Oh my god! What are you doing here?" She stepped off of the shuttle, followed by her three teammates.

"I could ask you the same." Ashley raised her gun again.

"Ash, it's me!" Sheppard said, a little put off by her response.

"Like hell. The Shepard I know wouldn't work with Cerberus."

"Ash." Garrus said, drawing her attention. "It's Shepard."

"What-Garrus?" She slowly lowered her gun. "Okay. Fine. So maybe you're Shepard. Seriously though, what the Hell! Two years! Two years and you were with Cerberus-"

"Chief!" Someone shouted. "They're coming over the barricade! We can't hold them back!"

Shepard glanced back at Jack and Grunt and nodded her head in the direction of the barricade. "Sic 'em."

Without further prompt the two warriors charged towards the fortification, a similar grin plastered on both of their faces.

"Look, Ash, I know we need to have this conversation. Right now, though, it looks like you need our help. I promise I'll try to explain afterwards, okay?"

Ashley scowled, but nodded reluctantly. "Fine." Shepard turned to

walk towards the barricade.

"Uh, one more thing." Ashley said. Shepard looked back at her. "You aren't the only person who popped up today. You'll meet them when you get out there... but they're really strange. Try not to shoot them."

Shepard frowned, but nodded. Tapping a hand to her helmet com, she opened a line with all the team. "Hey guys, if you see any strange non Collector things that aren't shooting at you... don't kill them, I guess."

"Will-er, won't do, Shepard." Garrus replied. The other two didn't even bother.

The collectors had already begun to fall back to their cruiser, but when Shepard arrived a group of them split off to fly back towards the commander.

Now they landed, opening up with gunfire at the Spectre, who barely managed to take cover behind a building.

"**AT LAST. SHEPARD.**" A glowing one said.

Shepard drew her shotgun, cloaked herself in a biotic aura and charged straight into the center of their group, blasting the Collectors back. "Who are you?" Shepard asked. "Why do you know my name?" She blasted two Collectors with her weapon, slaying them instantly.

"**WE ARE THE HARBINGER OF YOUR PERFECTION.**"

"Sooo..." Shepard took cover behind an upturned car. "A reaper, then."

"**REAPER IS A PITIFUL TITLE, BESTOWED ON US-**"

"-by the Protheans to give a name to their destruction'. Yeah, I already got this from Sovereign. Let me just get this out of the way right now. I don't care how 'eternal' or 'incomprehensible' you claim to be. I'm going to stop you."

"**FOOLISH HUMAN. YOU ARE BUT DUST, AND WE ARE A SOLAR WIND COME TO SWEEP YOU INTO ETERNITY. YOU WILL BE PERFECTED, CLEANSED. YOUR PETTY RACE SHALL BE HARVESTED, AS SHALL ALL THE REST.**"

"You know what? I don't believe you. The only reason to tell someone that there is hope is to try to make them lose it. And you know what else?"

Harbinger launched a biotic wave at Shepard, but with a pulse of biotics she charged through it to stand barely a foot away from the reaper host. "I'm tired of hearing you talk." With a blast of her shotgun, she destroyed it and watched it dissolve into ash. "Asshole." She muttered.

In the distance, the Collector ship rocketed into the sky.

When she reached the top of the barricade, she found that there wasn't a lot for her to do.

With the reinforcements of Jack and Grunt, plus Garrus in support, finishing off the husks was easy. The remaining Colonists, plus some guy with crazy green blades coming out of his arms, made short work of the few that remained in the horde. Meanwhile, out in the field, Shepard could see what looked like a battlemech with a hammer that seemed to be exploding, a blur of green armor, and some lady using some strange form of biotics and a sword slaughtering the remaining husks.

When the last husk had fallen, there was a silence broken only by a soft wind blowing across the plain. The colonists stared, their faces pale and eyes dull, at the carnage on the plain in front of their home. Cries of anguish began to ring out as they began to count their dead. The defenders had paid a heavy toll for their victory.

Teresa had been taking cover in the last bunker, but as the howls of the husks had died down she'd started across the battlefield, searching for her Ghost... companion? She still wasn't sure where they stood, exactly, but she felt it was probably a good idea to stay with him.

She found him standing, arms crossed, over the body of the woman from before. She'd been dragged out from under the pile of husks, her arms placed on her chest. Her eyes had been shut. He'd retrieved his rifle.

She stood silently next to him for a moment, watching him stare across the battlefield. "I thought you said you didn't know her." She said softly.

"I don't." He replied.

The moment ended with the sound of a rather rude woman yelling, "All of you people who said you came through a portal, get over here!"

"There she goes again." Teresa said. "Come on. We'd better see what this is about."

After a moment, he followed her.

...

When the Imperials, the Terrans, and the Master Chief had all found the spot the call had come from, they found a rather annoyed Ashley standing with a group of guards. She scowled at the sight of Master Chief.

"All right, I guess there are six, then." She motioned to the guards, who turned to face the group of newcomers. "Look, we're grateful for your help," she said in a voice that did not sound particularly grateful, "and so I've decided to give you another chance to explain why you're he-"

"Hello, there!" A voice said. The six of them looked up to see someone looking down on them from on top of the barricade.

"Who, exactly, are you?" Said Shepard, a friendly smile forming on her face.

End
file.